

Report to the Business Support Management Board

Boost Business Lancashire – Annual Report 2021-22

Background

The purpose of this report is to summarise the main activities and achievements of Boost, the business Growth Hub for Lancashire over the past 12 months. The role of Boost is to encourage economic growth in Lancashire by working with growth-oriented business. The Hub engages with and provides ongoing support to SMEs who have ambitions to grow. It works with them to access the various strands of direct Boost support and guides them to appropriate help provided by other business support agencies and private sector services at local, regional and national level. Boost receives its funding from a combination of LCC, ERDF and BEIS sources.

The prime aim of Boost is to accelerate the growth of SMEs in Lancashire, to stimulate new investment and job creation by systematically identifying and removing the barriers to their growth, by encouraging innovation and in promoting enterprise. The project addresses ongoing weaknesses within the Lancashire economy and market failures to provide the range of relevant business support needed by growth oriented businesses in Lancashire.

The core objectives of Boost are:

- To promote a programme of high quality business support to Lancashire SMEs
- To encourage entrepreneurship and the sustainable growth of Lancashire businesses
- To foster innovation, product development and business resilience;
- To encourage business support agencies to work together to provide a coordinated and easily understood business growth offer

2021-22 has been far from a typical year, the Covid pandemic has continued to disrupt business activities, with limitations placed on business operations and significant numbers of employees absent either through direct Covid infection, or through caring for family members.

On top of this, labour shortages, supply chain disruption, global shortages of shipping containers, rising fuel and heating costs, and the rising cost of raw materials have caused many businesses to re-evaluate their plans and to contact the Growth Hub for support.

The delivery of services online and via Teams/Zoom that were introduced in 2020 have continued throughout 2021-22, with face to face services gradually resuming as social distancing guidelines have allowed. Some clients however continue to prefer accessing services remotely, and going forward Boost services are being offered as a blend of face to face and remote platforms.

During the Covid pandemic with the introduction of social distancing measures and working from home arrangements we introduced weekly Zoom meetings where local partners have come together to meet with a wide range of specialist providers and organisations. This has promoted much greater awareness of the relative offers of

the various organisations, encouraged greater cooperation and resulted in increased referrals. The weekly briefings are regularly attended by 25-30 organisations.

“Covid affected us because, as a recruitment business that supplies to the care sector, it became much more difficult for us to go into care services. That was a huge challenge and recruiting was also difficult because we were partly working from home. The industry had to work around the restrictions.

Working with Boost’s coaches Peter Dickinson and Hayley Caine improved our structure and processes and gave greater accountability within the business. We also looked at what pieces needed to be added to the business for us to grow. The things we put in place during this period helped to sustain KTG and start us on the road to recovery.”

KTG Recruitment Ltd

In 2021-22 the headline achievements of Boost were:

- Number of businesses assisted – Target 400, achieved 838
- New jobs created – Target 330, achieved 347
- Number of new businesses created – Target 60, achieved 133
- Individuals helped to start a business – Target 120, achieved 173
- Number of IDB interventions (light/medium/intensive) – Target 500, achieved 418
- Gross Value Added – Target £10m, achieved £10.1m
- Referrals to core Boost Programmes - Target 250, achieved 214
- Website metrics - website hits - Target 5000, achieved 31,309

“The support Boost has provided through the funded workshops and coaching programme has been invaluable. Starting a new business is scary and there were a lot of things I didn’t know. My Boost coach Yusuf has been incredibly helpful throughout the journey, sharing his advice, providing referrals and recommending workshops and support to fill the gaps in my experience and knowledge.”

Yolo Wellbeing

Core activities

In parallel with the additional support needed as a result of Covid-19, Boost has needed to continue to deliver its core programmes including those funded by ERDF and BEIS. The Boost ‘offer’ to businesses is made up of a number of core ‘products’ or services. These were refreshed in January 2022 and comprise:

- **Business Relationship Management** (Client engagement and referrals)
- **Flying Start** (Pre-start and early stage businesses)
- **Growth Mentoring** (support for established businesses)
- **Boost Bespoke** (Scale Up support, new products/markets)
- **Boost Marketing** (programme wide business engagement)

BEIS Growth Hub Funding

(a) Growth Hub Delivery

In 2021-22 the Growth Hub received £536,500 of funding from BEIS to support delivery.

| Expenditure Head | Full year spend £ |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Growth Hub Delivery ERDF Match | 234,308 |
| Access to Finance | 119,628 |
| Boost and Co Collaborations (Resilience Support)* | 86,550 |
| Low Carbon Support | 50,000 |
| Executive and Performance Management | 46,130 |
| TOTAL | £536,616 (£536,500 claimed) |

* An element of the BEIS funding for 2021-22 enabled us to run a series of Resilience programmes which have been concentrated in the period January-March 2022 in response to the recent pressures being faced by many businesses.

(b) Peer Networks

Between September 2021 and March 2022 the Growth Hub delivered a second programme of Peer Networks, with grant funding of £290,00 from BEIS to enable groups of businesses to come together supported by a facilitated Action Learning process. The programme in Lancashire delivered 21 cohorts of support to 227 companies.

The programme was an overwhelming success with very positive feedback from those participating, and a 98% satisfaction rating. Business owners and managers from across Lancashire worked together to solve common challenges, share knowledge and grow as part of the Peer Networks business support programme. Participating businesses recruited staff, launched products and services, found new markets and improved their business resilience through the programme, which brought together owners and managers in a series of structured sessions to help them learn from each other.

Sector Priorities:

Priorities for support during 2021-22 have been the automotive, aerospace and digital/creative sectors. We have engaged with and work closely with the North West Aerospace Alliance and the Northern Automotive Alliance to provide specialist support for growing businesses in these key sectors. The Digital and Creative Sectors have also been priorities within Lancashire. We have also provided support for the hospitality and visitor economy sectors that have suffered more than most sectors from the impact of the Covid pandemic. In January 2022 we launched the Lancashire Watchtower initiative, seeking to promote the potential of the aerospace and advanced engineering sectors in Lancashire

Partnership working/Boost & Co.

Boost not only provides a number of funded programmes that provide direct delivery to businesses. Boost has a membership group of over 100 private and public sector

business support providers called 'Boost & Co'. Members include accountants, law firms, venture capital firms, banks, colleges, business membership organisations, networking groups and many more. Members of Boost & Co have specific services

As stated above, over the past 12 months in response to the Covid pandemic, we developed more numerous and more in-depth partnerships with the private sector across Lancashire in particular with private sector providers of business services and with intermediaries. Our weekly Zoom meetings provide a platform for all business support providers to get together, to share news and to share experiences. This has encouraged greater openness and cooperation and this has benefitted local businesses.

Performance management and monitoring

A team of 5 staff within Lancashire County Council's Economic Development Service manage the Boost delivery contracts. By separating the management and delivery functions in this way there is a strong focus on performance and the effectiveness of the delivery mechanisms. The contractual arrangements mean that there are strong financial incentives for the procured organisations to deliver against agreed targets and there are clear mechanisms for managing performance.

We have established a robust CRM system using the Evolutive platform and now collect a comprehensive set of data on each business. Each year we review the data we collect to ensure that it is compatible with the latest BEIS Metrics and Evaluation Framework. This includes the baseline position at the initial contact of each business with the Growth Hub, a detailed record of all interventions with each business, the outcome of the interventions and the net impact on the business. The system also records the destination where businesses have been referred onto other business support, including national programmes.

We collect customer feedback mechanisms in line with BEIS guidance. We also captured qualitative feedback on customer satisfaction as part of the independent evaluations of the Growth Hub together with an analysis of value for money. This feedback is used to continually improve service delivery. Included in the data fields are Companies Registration Number and postcode as the primary unique business identifiers.

We collect data on all interactions with businesses. Each month this information is collated and measured against targets that have been agreed covering key performance indicators and outputs. This information is presented to a monthly meeting of the Boost Operational Group, made up of all delivery organisations plus the PMT from LCC. Any under-performance is highlighted, challenged and remedial action agreed. This is followed up in contract review meetings with the individual providers.

Customer satisfaction

An annual survey of businesses that have received support is carried out. In terms of satisfaction with the support they received the following responses were obtained during 2020-21:

"How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of this service?" rated on a five-point scale.

| | | | | | |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------------------|
| 1/5 | 2/5 | 3/5 | 4/5 | 5/5 | Total Sample Size |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------------------|

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|----|-----|-----|
| 5 | 6 | 8 | 52 | 265 | 336 |
|---|---|---|----|-----|-----|

(94.3% satisfaction rating)

Note: (1 Very Dissatisfied- very poor, 2 Somewhat Dissatisfied - poor, 3 Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied- average, 4 Somewhat Satisfied - good, 5 Very Satisfied – excellent)

As highlighted above, the Peer Networks programme also received a 98% satisfaction rating (either satisfied or very satisfied).

“Seeking the support from a mentor gave me confidence – a new perspective on sales. Stephen taught me what to listen for during a sales conversation and to recognise ‘buying signals’ from the customer. He also regularly provides the team with sales training, particularly dealing with objection handling and objection techniques. They get huge value from the training.”

Stephen also helped me to manage a better work/life balance – which is really important to me.

Boost Growth Mentoring programme improved my confidence in selling and has also given me several connections to influential people including contacts with Rossendale Borough Council and UCLan. This has helped me grow the business and has to open a number of doors of opportunity.”

Scrap Local

External Evaluation

The Growth Hub is the subject of periodic (18 month) external assessment and evaluation, the most recent of these being in December 2021 and this included a survey of 278 beneficiary companies. Overall, the report was very positive, noting that Boost has had to adjust significantly during the pandemic period in order to respond to the changing needs of Lancashire businesses, at the same time as it has needed to deliver its contracted output that are conditions of its external funding. The evaluation included an analysis of the impact of the support provided by the Growth Hub and customer satisfaction feedback.

All of the survey respondents looking to start a business indicated that they had made progress with 41% having met that goal and a further 25% having made a lot of progress. Over 80% of the respondents seeking to scale up their businesses had made some progress, with 10% having achieved their goal and 33% having made a lot of progress. Of the 278 survey respondents 81% were satisfied or very satisfied with the support they had received with a further 13% neither satisfied or dissatisfied.

Recommendation:

Members of the Business Support Management Board are requested to approve this report.

Andy Walker, Head of Business Growth
May 2022